

Halo 2: Heresy

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Summary: The year is 2552. The HumanCovenant War has raged for over 30 years, ravaging the galaxy around it. Now, Humanity's worst fear has been realised. The Covenant have found their way to Earth. Now the sole survivor on the attack on Reach, Master Chief SPARTA

1. Prologue

**Prologue**

Report on the Atrocity at Halo **To the Prophet of Truth:**

Most high and honoured Prophet: It is with greatest shame that I lay myself before the judgement of the Council. I expect and will accept no mercy. My failure in this matter is absolute I embrace my responsibility and my punishment.

The disgrace and blasphemy at Halo was an abomination caused by my incompetence and failure of judgement. Although the tales and rumours of the Demon have basis in fact, much of this talk is Unggoy superstition and exaggeration. Certainly the Demon, a Human, activated the catastrophic engine-failure sequence on the crashed Human vessel, but it was allowed to do so because of failures in security and tactics for which I bear full responsibility.

I have no good news to relay, but the Human action was suicidal, either by accident or design. I believe none escaped the catastrophe.

AS ever, Jiralhanae accounts of the conflict are unreliable and their accounts of this Human's abilities and actions are absurd. No Human is capable of the things they gossip and chatter about. I suspect panic and excuse, as well as confusion caused by the spread of the parasite.

_The Human in question is certainly unusual, although not the

creature it has been described as. It stands taller than most, is faster and more aggressive, but still irrevocably a Human animal, worthy of neither fear nor respect. It is merely an exception that proves the rule. As always, Humans remain beneath our contempt. Their failure at Reach compounds their defeat. We sense that their defences are failing rapidly. I have gathered information about the Human's armour, abilities, and weapons, which follows this report._

Perhaps more worrisome is the discovery and subsequent conflict with the parasite on Halo. This monstrosity festered, rotted, and waited on the Holy World, and although we cannot be sure, the Humans may have released it from its shackles. I do not presume to know the unknowable, but I suspect that the Forerunners meant this filth to stay imprisoned forever. The sacred grace of Halo was polluted before it was destroyed.

I await my punishment with faith and honour.

Supreme Commander, Fleet of Particular Justice

What follows this report is information on the "Demon", Master Chief, schematics and statistics on both Human and Covenant weapons and vehicles, and strategies to be used in the invasion of the Human homeworld "Earth".

Covenant Holy City, High Charity, Ninth Age of Reclamation

"There was only one ship."

An echo of excitement and anxiety echoed around High Charity's Council Chamber.

"One? Are you sure?" The Prophet of Regret, or rather, his hologram asked.

"Yes." The Supreme Commander responded, without hesitation. How could he not be sure? He had spent standard weeks pondering his actions, questioning his motives after the atrocity at the Holy Ring. "They called itâ€¦ The Pillar of Autumn."

"Why was it not destroyed with the rest of their fleet!" The Prophet of Mercy demanded, ironically without a hint of mercy.

"It fled," The Supreme Commander responded, now with a hint of satisfaction in his voice, even during this brutal interrogation. "As we set fire to their planet, but I followed with all the ships in my command."

"When you first saw Halo, were you _blinded _by its majesty?" Asked Regret.

"Blinded?" Inquired the Commander

"Paralysed? Dumbstruck?" Offered Regret

"No!" The Commander firmly responded. He could see where the Prophet was going with his questions.

"Yet the Humans were able to evade your ships," Regret continued, his voice growing in volume and intimidation. "Land on the Sacred Ring,

and desecrate it with their filthy footsteps!" The Prophet hammered in his point, slamming his holographic fist onto his holographic hoverchair.

"Noble Hierarchs" The Commander answered, the satisfaction in his voice replaced by traces of desperation and pleading. "Surely you understand that once the parasite attackedâ€" The Commander's words were lost among a wave of distressed outcry from the Councillors in attendance. Those that were not able to be present at the Council, including Regret, were represented by live holographic representations or AI representations programmed to act in exactly the same way their real-life counterparts would.

"There will be order in this council!" Mercy cried, trying desperately to silence the crowd of various Covenant representatives lined on the raised benches. Emotional pain wrought his wizened face; he more than any other member of the Covenant was greatly disturbed by the discovery of the Flood on Halo. His cries, however, fell to deaf ears.

"You were right to focus your attention on the Flood." Said a voice from behind Mercy. The Prophet of Truth emerged from the shadows behind Regret and Mercy, arms raised, his voice calm as ever. At once the Council Chamber fell silent. Truth had that effect upon all among the Covenant. He was the Councillor Most High, the highest rank among the Prophets, and a figurehead that lead the entire Covenant by example. "But this Demon, this 'Master Chief'â€" He continued, then stopped. He did not need to say any more. All present had heard of the Demon on Halo, a supposed super-Human with strength, speed and authority to rival the Sangheili, and eyesight, accuracy and reflexes to shame the Kig-yar.

"By the time I learned the Demon's intent, there was nothing I could do." The Commander responded, his voice gradually becoming a hushed whisper of shame. This was a blatant lie, and everyone present knew it; he had ample time to increase security around the crash site of the Human vessel on Halo. After all, his troops had intercepted a number of transmissions from the Human AI "Cortana" about the supposed plan to detonate the vessel's engines and destroy the Ringworld, but he was confident that because of the location of the crash site and the infestation of the Flood, that such a mission would be impossible, at best. However, once the Demon commandeered a Banshee aircraft from the Covenant cruiser Truth and Reconciliation, the Commander hurriedly deployed a squad of Special-Operatives Unggoy, Sangheili and Lekgolo to dispatch of the threat to the Holy Ring. Apparently this was an underestimation of the Demon's true abilities, and He managed to destroy both the wreckage of the Human ship and the Ringworld simultaneously. However, the Commander surmised, such an action was suicidal, and the Covenant could rest assured that the Demon was no longer a threat to their Great Journey.

The tumult in the Council Chamber rose once again, and the Commander noticed that a few Councillors had started to mutter and nod conspiratorially among themselves. Behind the Prophets, the Jiralhanae Chieftain, Tartarus, chuckled gruffly and audibly. Regret's hologram, leaning over to Truth, whispered in his ear, "Noble Prophet of Truth, this has gone on long enough! Make an example of this bungler! The council demands it!" Truth silenced him, and the clamouring crowd, with a wave of his hands.

"You are one of our most treasured instruments." Truth referred to the Commander, the perpetual calmness present in his voice, but also with a growing harshness with every word, every syllable. "Long have you led your fleet with honour and distinction." The Commander's head hung low, from flattery from such a high-ranking Prophet such as Truth, but also from the growing feeling of dread in his abdomen that was beginning to envelop his senses. "But your inability to safeguard Halo!" The harshness in Truth's voice was definite now, and malice was creeping into his words. "It was a colossal failure!"

"Nay!" Cried a Councillor from the benches. "It was _heresy_" There was instant uproar at this statement, but it was supportive towards the Councillor, and the Commander saw no sympathy for him in those benches. As he expected.

"I _will _continue my campaign against the Humans!" The Commander proclaimed, his restraint and patience wearing thin.

"No! You will not." Truth responded icily, signalling to Tartarus, who waved and gave an authoritative bark. At once two Jiralhanae grasped the Commander by the elbows, expecting resistance. The Commander offered none, but shook off the Jiralhanae guards with contempt. It wasn't as if he did not know where he was going. After all, as the Councillor stated, he had committed heresy, and he was certain that he was being led to where all heretics received their punishment, or part of it. It was no secret; in fact it was a public display.

"Soon the Great Journey shall begin." Truth continued, his voice still icy yet, as always, calm. "But when it does the weight of your heresy shall stay your feet. And you shall be left behind."

2. Chapter 1: Suiting Up

****_Chapter 1: Suiting Up_****

****Earth Defence Platform, Cairo, 10.20.2552 (Military Calendar)****

Gunnery Sergeant Harrison "Guns" Martins was the Weapons and Technical Specialist on board the Cairo Orbital Defence Platform around Earth. His task for today was to debrief the recent "arrival", SPARTAN 117, commonly known as John, the infamous Master Chief, on his Mjolnir Mark V Battle Armour. Not an easy task, considering that the Chief had the most experience in the suit than any other human alive, and that the Chief had actually been in the UNSC service 10 years longer than Martins himself. But he tried.

"The plating was about to fail, there's viscosity throughout the gel-layer." Martins started, pointing to the various components of the Mark V scattered on the table. "Optics are totally fried." He continued, holding up a binocular-shaped component. "And let's not even talk about the power supply." He finished his report, indicating to the power cell. "Y'know how expensive this gear is, son?" He asked the Master Chief sarcastically. On any other circumstance, Martins wouldn't have dared to even speak to the SPARTAN super-soldier, having heard grizzly tales of what they were capable of, but Martins was the only person on the Cairo Station, besides the Master Chief,

who knew how the Mjolnir suit worked, and the only one who knew how to repair and maintain the Battle Armour. The Master Chief reached over, took his new helmet, and attached it over his head.

"Tell that to the Covenant." He answered grimly, shining iridescently in his new Armour.

"Well." Surmised Martins, "I guess it was all obsolete anyway. Your new suit's a Mark VI, just came up from SONGNIM this mornin'. Try and take it easy until you get used to the upgrades."

"Understood" John answered.

"OK, lets test your targeting, first thing." Martins said, indicating to a circular device set into the floor behind him. It had red lights on at the top, bottom and sides. John recognised this a targeting station; he had used one of these to re-test his Mjolnir Mark V after a quick cryogenic thaw on the UNSC ship Pillar of Autumn not so long ago.

"Please look at the top light." Martins said, reciting the standard procedure for operating this machinery. The red light at the top winked on. John thought of looking at this light, and his helmet angled upwards sharply. It appeared that the new Mjolnir suit reacted even more sensitively than the Mark V John was used to. Meaning, he thought, that more time could be spent with concentrating about strategies than moving.

"Good. Now look at the bottom light." Martins continued. The top light switched off, and the bottom light winked on. John thought about looking at the light slowly, and his helmet angled his head gracefully downwards. He had adapted quickly to the new suit.

"Alright. Look at the top light again." Martins said, noting the Master Chief's quick adaption to the new Mjolnir system. To be able to adjust to such a complicated system so quickly would require years of military experience and lightning-fast reflexes. Then again, he reasoned, the Chief was a SPARTAN, and everyone within the UNSC had heard rumours of what the SPARTANS had been subjected to as children to enhance their abilities.

Once again John thought slowly about looking at the top light, and the Mjolnir system registered his thoughts, analysed them, processed them to physical action, and performed these actions. The Chief's helmet angled to the light.

"That's it. Now the bottom one." Martins stated. He already knew that the Chief would be able to perform this. After all, just one movement had been sufficient for the Chief to adapt to his new suit. Sure enough, the Mjolnir helmet angled downwards, and the bottom light flicked off.

"OK. Everything checks out. Standby, I'm gonna offline the inhibitors." Martins said, pressing a button on the console in front of the Master Chief. The titanium rings that held the Master Chief in a stationary position slid upwards. The inhibitors were installed just yesterday in the armoury, for the Chief's debriefing. They were normally used to hold criminal suspects or terrorists in one place for interrogation, but today they were needed as a different safety

precaution. It was possible that the Chief would be slow to adapt to the new Mjolnir armour, and the inhibitors were set into place so that the Chief could not damage himself or Martins from unwanted movement.

"Move around a little, get a feel for it. When you're ready, come meet me by the Zapper." Martins instructed, walking away from the targeting station to the shield-test station, nicknamed the Zapper because of the strong electrical charge used to test energy shields' durability.

John was moving around slowly at the targeting station, orienting himself with the new suit's movement capabilities and HUD display. After a few minutes he was able to sprint, roll, crouch, walk and jump. He scaled a desk and landed a few feet away from the shield-testing platform.

"Hey, take it easy! You'll tear a tendon doin' that!" Martins warned John before moving on. "Pay attention, 'cause I'm only goin' over this once. This station'll test your recharging energy shields." He informed "Step on in, I'll show ya'." John complied, walking onto the red square between two yellow arms of metal. "Your new armour's shields are extremely resilient, very efficient." Martins informed, with a hint of pride. "_Much _better than the Covenant tech we used for the Mark V. Go ahead and use the switch in front of ya' to start the shield test." John looked down at the hand-activated switch in front of him. A message on his HUD displayed the message "Press and HOLD to start energy shield test." Much more sophisticated, John noticed, than the Mark V suit's HUD. John affirmed, and his right hand sprang up and laid itself on the touchpad. At once the yellow arms of metal around John started to spin, and a yellow trail of energy could be seen trailing from the arms at eye-level. John noticed the shield's energy display on his HUD had dropped to one-quarter, and then rose rapidly.

"Bingo!" Martins shouted over the noise of the still-spinning metal arms. "As you can see, they recharge a _lot _faster." An elevator opened behind Martins, and a Sergeant in dress uniform walked out. This went unseen to Martins, as he was absorbed in explaining the shields' specifications to the Master Chief.

"If your shields go down, find some cover, wait for the meter to read fully-charged" Martin informed John, as if this was not self-evident.

"That, or he could hide behind me." The Sergeant joked. Martins finally turned to notice this newcomer. "You done with my buy, here, Master Guns? I don't _see _any training-wheels." The Sergeant asked synically.

"His armour's working fine, Johnson, so shut your chilli-hole!" Martins retorted irately. Sergeant Johnson, John thought. He had encountered Johnson before, on Orbital Station Gamma during the Battle of Reach. They had both barely escaped with their lives. John then ran into Johnson several times on the Ringworld, Halo. John had thought that he was the only one who escaped, until he arrived at Earth and was told that he was the _second _survivor from Halo. John barely believed this, until he met Johnson himself, and they were both informed that they were to attend a special private ceremony on the Cairo. John agreed, reluctantly, but only because he was promised

that the occasion would be completely privatised, with only a few Admirals, Sergeants and Majors present; to be honest, John was getting annoyed with everyone's wide-eyed staring at his height and Mjolnir armour.

"You're free to go, son. Just remember, take things _slow_." Martins told the Chief, snapping him out of his reverie.

"Don't worry, I'll hold his hand." Johnson answered sarcastically, before turning and walking back to the elevator. John followed, walking at a pace he as used to in the Mjolnir system. Small motes of iridescent light floated around the room as it was reflected from the windows onto the Master Chief's suit.

"So, Johnson, when you gonna tell me how you made it back home in one piece?" Martins asked, in a would-be casual manner, before Johnson had a chance to start the elevator. Rumours were running rampant among the lower ranks in the UNSC about Johnson's mysterious escape from Halo, and everybody was trying to find out for themselves.

"Sorry, Guns, it's classified." Johnson replied, as he did to all who tried to interrogate him.

Martins snorted. "My ass! Well, you can forget about your adjustments to your A2 scopeâ€|" His words were drowned out by the elevator's pneumatic doors.

"Well, he's in a particularly _fine _mood. Maybe Lord Hood didn't give him an _invitation_." Johnson chuckled grimly.

As the elevator's doors opened, a small landing was revealed to Johnson and the Master Chief. A tram was parked in front of them, with a small sitting area below. Outside, Earth's shining hemisphere was visible through the large overhead windows. Johnson mounted the tram, and the Master Chief followed. As the tram started its slow movement, Johnson reflected quietly to the Master Chief.

"Earth, heh, haven't seen it in years. When I shipped out for Basic, the Overload defence grid was all 'theory' and 'politics'. Now look," He turned to face the other windows, where Cairo Station's towering MAC cannon blocked out most of the view of space. "The Cairo is just one of 300 Geo-Sync platforms! That MAC gun can put a round clean through a Covenant capital ship! With co-ordinated fire from the Athens, and the Malta, nothin's getting through this battle cluster in one piece!"

As the tram approached their destination, Johnson pointed out to the Master Chief, "Ships've been arrivin' all mornin'. Nobody's sayin' much, but I'll bet somethin' big's about to happen." John as inquisitive, but did not voice his opinion; he had just noticed several Privates and Lieutenants at the landing platform, cheering as they caught sight of his trademark green armour. This was a public event, he concluded, not what he was told. As they disembarked the tram, John noticed something else that thoroughly annoyed him, and he voiced it to Johnson in an undertone.

"You told me there wouldn't be any cameras" As a Hover-Cam floated overhead, capturing as much of the two war heroes as possible.

"And you to me you were gonna wear somethin' nice!" Johnson growled back. "Folks need heroes, Chief, to give 'em hope. So smile, would ya'? While we still got somethin' to smile about!" He lifted his hat to smooth back his hair, as the two Sergeants at the doors to the Briefing Hall, also in dress uniform, stood at ease and moved aside to let them pass.

****Covenant Holy City, High Charity, Ninth Age of Reclamation****

The Ex-Supreme Commander of the Fleet of Particular Justice was escorted outside the Council Chamber of High Charity, to the place where all accused of heresy were brought. As he walked down the isle to the Shameful Post, a mighty jeering cry arose from the crowd gathered. Many hundreds of every race within the Covenant had turned out to witness the Shaming and Branding of such a high officer in the Covenant hierarchy. Many Unggoy were too small to see over the swarms of crowds, and some had climbed up onto the backs of willing Lekgolos, where they were supported by the large spines protruding from the Lekgolos' backs. Those Unggoy who were fortunate to get to the front row of the crowd had taken up a guttural chant of, "He-re-tic! He-re-tic!" as the Commander walked by. When they approached to Post, the two Jiralhanae guards that had escorted the Commander wrenched his wrists upwards and secured them in place with holo-binders. The Commander futilely tested their strength; they moved barely an inch.

"You've drawn quite a crowd" Tartarus commented, as if it were something unimportant, like politics or the destruction of a small Human vessel.

"If the came to hear me beg, they will be disappointed." The Commander growled, refusing to meet Tartarus' gaze.

"Are you sure?" Tartarus responded, activating the plasma charges within the holo-binders. Orange beams of plasma erupted along the Commander's arms, meeting in the middle of his thorax. Pain spasmed through his body, et he defied the crowd's wishes and remained silent. He could feel the pain tugging at the edges of his mind, threatening to pull him into unconsciousness, or madness, yet he contained his anguish, anger and pain within himself. All the while the plasma burned at his armour and exposed skin.

****Earth Defence Platform, Cairo, 10.20.2552 (Military Calendar)****

The Master Chief and Sergeant Johnson approached the stage where Lord Hood was sanding and saluted. The sound of applause echoed all around them as the gathered Sergeants, Majors and Admirals clapped enthusiastically. Lord Hood returned the salute.

"Gentlemen, we're lucky to have you back." He said. A worried-looking Sergeant leaned over, whispered in Lord Hoods ear, stood back at his position near the holo-screen. Lord Hood, turning to a holo-tank situated to the right of the holo-screen. "Go ahead, Cortana." He said to it. At once the holo-projectors at the base of the tank sparked to life, and the AI representation of Cortana fizzled into existence. Small streams of data floated over her purple body, analysing the gathered information from the various Scanning Stations positioned in geosynchronous orbit around Earth.

"Another Whisper, sir, near Io. We have probes en route." She said in a casual, almost bored manner. Whispers were common occurrences around the Sol system. They were extremely small holes in Shaw-Fujikawa "Slipspace", that the Covenant were known to use for reconnaissance before invading a system. Probes that were sent would close the Slipspace rupture before the Covenant had a chance to gather too much information, if indeed it was actually the Covenant that had caused the rupture. And yet they were normally around Neptune or Pluto. Having one around one of Jupiter's moons was slightly worrisome, not only because it was only two planets away from Earth, but also because of the major ship-building and intelligence stations positioned around Jupiter itself.

"I apologise, but we're going to have to make this quick." Lord Hood apologised to the Master Chief and Johnson. He moved off to gather the medals.

"You look nice" Cortana said, turning to the Master Chief as he waited patiently to be awarded his medal.

"Thanks" The Master Chief said

"Thank you" said Sergeant Johnson, simultaneously.

"Sergeant Major" Lord Hood announced. At once Johnson snapped to attention, "The Colonial Cross I awarded for singular acts of daring, and devotion. For a soldier of the United Earth Space Corps there can be no greater honour bestowed. Wear this medal with honour, soldier" Pinning the medal onto Johnson's lapel, he saluted.

"Sir! Thank you, sir!" Johnson returned the salute sharply.

"Master Chief" Lord Hood continued, "I award you also with the Colonial Cross. There would be other awards, but I understand that you have already achieved every other type of medal during your various campaigns." A small smile tugged at the corners of Lord Hood's mouth as he searched for a place to pin the medal on the Master Chief's armour, before resignedly handing it to him. Master Chief saluted, and replied in the same to as Johnson "Sir! Thank you, sir!"

A third woman, a Commander whom John had never seen before, had stepped forward, and was now standing on his right. She seemed oddly familiar, but John was sure that he had never fought alongside her, either on the ground or on a spaceship.

"Commander Miranda Keyes." Lord Hood was addressing the female officer, "Your father's actions were in keeping with the highest traditions of military service. His action in the face of danger and impossible odds reflects great credit upon both himself, and the UNSC. The Navy has lost one of its best." He handed the female officer a medal, and she stared at it with sadness etched into her facial features, before looking up at Lord Hood and saluting, responding with a crisp, "Sir! Thank you, sir!" Her voice wavered as she spoke, but she did her best to hide her grief.

John remained silent as ever, yet his mind was internally bombarded with new information. This was Captain Jacob Keyes' daughter? He had no recollection of Captain Keyes mentioning anything about his kin in the UNSC, but that was to be expected; this information, in an

enemy's hands, could be used against him to gain valuable intelligence about classified military projects, especially the history of the SPARTAN II project.

There were four other officers that were decorated for their heroic actions at the ceremony; all of them were survivors of the Covenant assault on the Epsilon Eridani system. Despite the officers' best efforts, the horrors that they witnessed at REACH were hidden within their features. At the end of the ceremony, Lord Hood turned to them and saluted them. As one, they returned the salute, before Lord Hood addressed them, "Dismissed, soldiers."

And that's when all Hell broke loose.

****Covenant Holy City, High Charity, Ninth Age of Reclamation****

"This Sangheili has broken the pact of the Covenant! This is a sickening act, and there can be no greater heresy! Let him be an example to all who would break our Covenant!" The words swam through the murky mire of the ex-Commander's mind, yet they did not comprehend. He had heard these words before, they were the words spoken when a creature of the Covenant had committed heresy, before they were branded with the Mark of Shame. The Commander was feeling terrible; his head throbbed mercilessly and his very skin felt as if it were on fire. He slowly recollected being punished for his failure at the Ringworld, how he was stripped of his title and his glory, before being burned mercilessly with the Shackles of Treason. After that there was a great blank space in his memory, and he concluded that he had passed out while being tortured. Lethargically, he raised his head and opened one eye. Tartarus was addressing the crowd that had gathered to watch his punishment. He swung his arm and gave an authoritative bark to the Jiralhanae guards that were still positioned at the Commander's side. Slowly, they started to deprive the Commander of his armour. Every section of armour that was removed was broken mercilessly under the Jiralhanae guards' brutish strength, often renting the Commander's crisp skin with the jagged pieces of metal that composed the armour. When the Commander was completely removed of his armour it was tossed aside, and he hung there in his holo-binders, shamed, stripped of his title and now his armour and dignity. Having performed this punishment many times on accused heretics before his appointment to the Fleet of Particular Justice, he knew what was to befall him next, and he yearned for death rather than face the torture that was to be the final accusation of heresy, The Branding. Gaining enough strength out of desperation, he opened both his eyes and looked at Tartarus in front of him. The Jiralhanae Chieftain stood an arm's breadth away, holding the ornate Brand of Shame in both hands. A glowing mirror-image of the Mark of Shame shone softly from the Brand's end. Planting both feet on the floor, Tartarus levered the Brand and planted it heavily upon the Commander's thorax. The searing pain engulfed his senses, blotting out all sight, sound and smell, before amplifying them with a nauseating lurch. He heard the crowd's jeers, smelt saw the poorly-hidden satisfaction on Tartarus' face, smelt his skin burning as he was Branded. Letting go of his actions, he felt his mandibles slowly open wide, a scream of unbearable agony passing from his four lips.

****Earth Defence Platform, Cairo, 10.20.2552 (Military Calendar)****

Various alarms sounded all around the Cairo Station, warning of an imminent and dangerous threat. Human rebels would never present an open attack on their home planet, so everyone's worst fears were confirmed. The Covenant had found Earth. In her holotank, Cortana monitored all the available information.

"Slipspace ruptures, directly off our battle cluster." She informed Lord Hood.

"Show me." He replied, his voice eerily calm. The holo-screen behind him jumped into action, minimising the UNSC Defence Force emblem that was emblazoned on the screen during the ceremony.

"Fifteen Covenant capital ships holding position just outside the kill-zone" Cortana informed matter-of-factly, showing on the holo-screen a curvature of Earth with the battle cluster in orbit, with the representation of a whale-shaped ship highlighting a box on the other side of the screen; the Covenant fleet. Suddenly the com system crackled to life, and a gruff voice rang over the radio-waves:

"This is Fleet Admiral Harper. We are engaging the enemy!" A box with a representation of a Human vessel displayed the Human fleet, moving rapidly

"Negative, Admiral! Form a defensive perimeter around the cluster!" Lord Hood ordered authoritatively. Turning to Commander Keyes, he gave orders swiftly. "Commander, get to your ship! Link up with the fleet!"

"Yes, sir!" She replied, saluting, and before even waiting to be dismissed, left at a rapid pace..

"You have the MAC gun, Cortana. As soon as they come in range, open up!"

"Gladly." She responded, fizzling out of her holotank.

"Something's not right; the fleet that destroyed Reach was fifty times this size!" Lord Hood mused quietly, pondering the Covenant's strategy. Before he had a chance to continue, a young Sergeant at a console yelped in panic:

"Sir; additional contacts! Boarding craft and _lots_ of 'em"

"They're going to try and take our MAC guns offline; give their ships a straight shot at Earth!" Lord Hood's voice had a hint of admiration at the Covenant's tactics. Turning to the only two soldiers left, Lord Hood gave out his final order. "Master Chief! Defend this station!"

"Yes, sir!" He responded, adrenaline surging in his blood at the thought of the imminent battle. Turning to Johnson, who was still at his side, the Master Chief said simply, "I need a weapon."

Sergeant Johnson smirked, knowing what 'weapons' the Master Chief would need. "Right this way", he replied.

Overhead several Human vessels loomed over the Cairo Station, as Lord

Hood had ordered. Dozens of Longsword fighter-bombers zipped past the strengthened windows. The battle for Earth had begun.

End
file.